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DATE: May 14, 1999

TO: Mr. Thomas Ferns
U.S. Department of Energy
Richland Operations Office
P.O. Box 550
MSIN HO-12
Richland, WA 99352

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DOE-RL / DIS

SUBJECT: Hanford Reach

Dear Mr. Ferns:

I am writing as Trout Unlimited's Pacific Northwest Regional Vice President to respectfully request that you and your staff carefully consider the following points regarding the protection of the Columbia River's Hanford Reach:

The Hanford Reach ecosystem, including the Hanford Reservation, contains the best of what remains of the shrub-steppe ecosystem that once blanketed eastern Washington. Large blocks of intact habitat support hundreds of diverse native plants and animals. The Hanford Reach, the last free-flowing segment of the Columbia River in the United States, provides a migration corridor and critical spawning and rearing habitat for fall Chinook salmon. Because much of the similar habitat surrounding Hanford has been converted to agriculture or degraded by other uses, the Hanford Reach and adjacent, uncontaminated Department of Energy (DOE) lands represent an irreplaceable natural legacy and should be immediately and permanently protected.

Trout Unlimited (North America's leading trout, salmon and steelhead conservation organization) supports the DOE Preferred Alternative, but with the following modifications:

A. INCLUDE ADDITIONAL CRITICAL LANDS IN THE REFUGE

The following adjoined DOE lands should be managed as a permanent National Wildlife Refuge: the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve, the McGee Ranch, the Riverland area, all DOE land on the entire Wahluke Slope, the Hanford Reach, and the Columbia River islands. This will provide a much-needed, large, continuous "crescent" of protected land surrounding central Hanford. These areas are prime fish and wildlife habitat, uncontaminated by Hanford operations, and should not wait for protection until the complex decisions involving clean-up in the central Hanford area is made.

To expedite a final decision on management of uncontaminated lands, DOE should issue a separate Record of Decision (ROD) for the areas mentioned above.

C. LIMIT DESTRUCTIVE ACTIVITIES ON THE SLOPE

To ensure long-term protection for key native species and systems located across the Site (including central Hanford), there should be no agriculture, commercial mining, or livestock grazing permitted. High intensity recreation should be limited to development of a museum at the B-Reactor. High Intensity Recreation is a loophole for developments such as destination resorts, golf courses and commercial facilities.

Because the Hanford Site is one of the last places in eastern Washington supporting large areas of native shrub-steppe vegetation and related wildlife, Trout Unlimited strongly urges DOE to permanently protect the ecologically significant lands at Hanford.

Thank you for your personal commitment to this vitally important matter, Mr. Ferns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James E. Wilcox".

JAMES E. WILCOX

Vice President

Pacific Northwest Region,

Trout Unlimited